

Telephone interview with HN Dan Skiles, Company G, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, Korean War hospital corpsman. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Navy Medical Department, 2 and 7 May 2002.

Where are you from originally?

I'm from Florida, the Tampa area. I was born in the little town of Valrico.

Where did you go to school?

We moved around a lot in my earlier days. I went to John Kinley grammar school in Tampa. I then went to Brandon junior high and high school. Then we moved down to Lake Okeechobee and I went to Pahokie High School. That was the last high school I attended in Florida.

I came to southern California at age 17, and went to boot camp in San Diego, then corps school in San Diego at Balboa Naval Hospital. My first duty station was Santa Margarita Ranch in Oceanside. I had my choice of duty stations anywhere in the U.S. and a buddy of mine talked me into going to the Santa Margarita Ranch because I liked to ride horses. Of course, being from flat Florida, I fell in love with the mountains when I moved to California. I figured that a ranch would be just fine. I didn't know that it was Camp Pendleton. We had a Navy command within a Marine command. It was a helluva situation.

Wasn't that the Field Medical Service School?

No. That was the old naval hospital hospital at Oceanside--Santa Margarita Ranch.

When I was in corps school at San Diego, Korea broke out. So they advanced us a bit. I spent a good year at the naval hospital at Pendleton. I put in for several schools, anything to get off that base. Finally, I got neuropsychiatric technician school, which I thought was in Philadelphia. But they had just opened one up at Oak Knoll in Oakland.

I went through the school and graduated in the second graduating class. That's where that famous picture of me used to hang for a long time. Anyway, I graduated, became part of the staff, and during that time I met my wife.

It wasn't too long before I was assigned to the Fleet Marine Force and reported to Camp Pendleton, Camp del Mar, where the Field Medical School was at that time. We had the last barracks right down at the ocean. It was like going through Marine boot camp. We had every rank. We even had a full commander go through there. There were doctors as well as corpsmen.

What were they teaching you?

Advanced first aid. Field medicine. We were also taught munitions, mines, small arms. I qualified on everything. But they didn't give us badges for qualifying. We just had to do it to show proficiency.

We had very extensive training and I enjoyed every bit of it. It was very relaxing and very different from Navy boot camp, mainly because we outranked the Marine DIs that we had.

Did you say you outranked them?

We had time in service and everything on them. We had chiefs; and, as I said, we had full commanders going through there. We in the Hospital Corps, being very non-military, kind of balked at all the spit and polish discipline.

Weren't you an HN then?

I was an HN and I retired as an HN.

What year was that?

It was 1952. When I graduated from Field Med training, we decided to get married and did so in Yuma, Arizona. Two weeks later I was on a garbage scow in San Diego Harbor, turned 20, and was headed overseas.

What kind of ship was it?

It was an MSTs ship, the *General John Pope* (AP-). There's an interesting side line on that. After I moved to Pinole and got into Cub Scouting, one of my cohorts in scouting was the navigation officer on that darned thing during World War II.

It must have been a pretty old beat up ship by the time you got aboard.

We had 5,000 Marines on that ship, all sweaty. I went over with the 20th Replacement Draft. We had 2 nights in Kobe, Japan. Then we proceeded on through the Yellow Sea and went into Inchon Harbor.

I spent a week with the 3rd Battalion, Med Company, being oriented. Then I was assigned to George Company, which is Company G, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. I was one of two corpsmen in the platoon. Each platoon had two corpsmen. I got my baptism of fire right off the bat.

Where did your platoon go?

This platoon was all over the place. When I joined George Company the first guy I met was a Marine, PFC George McDougal. George and I have kept in touch with each other ever since. We've been to each other's children's weddings.

Where was your unit operating at that time?

The Marines were very romantic about naming their hills. We had a place called Hill 191 and 190.5. The Army later called that place Old Baldy after we got through with it. It had a few trees when I first went up there. I had no sooner joined the company when I immediately was told to go on a night patrol. I knew no one. I went out with one of the squads and up a hill. It was my first introduction to a combat line outfit. I was scared to death. I had no idea where I was. I made it through the night and back to our base camp. Then we did an about face and went out up on 191 and 190.5. I had no sleep and was walking around getting acquainted with the troops. I had no idea who the oldtimers were or anything. As a corpsman, you had to be known and you had to know your men. If you didn't, you were going to get killed real quick.

I was walking along the trench line and was sniped at all morning and didn't even know it. "Gee, they've got some funny sounding bugs here." Then one bullet came pretty close to my head and I suddenly realized that some idiot was over there shooting at me. He wasn't a very good shot or he would have gotten me very easily.

Didn't any of these Marines tell you that it wasn't a very smart thing to do to be walking along that ridge line like that?

I'll tell you. You have to earn your way with the Marine Corps. To make a long story short, we got some incoming mortar fire. I really didn't have to be told about that. Of course, I

jumped into a bunker along the trench line. Then I looked outside and here's this guy sunbathing in the trench. I thought he must be an oldtimer here, a real salt. It turns out this poor devil had come in the same draft as I did. He woke up and got some dirt blown all over him. Someone then told him that that was incoming. Scared to death, he came running in just as another round hit and he got a piece of shrapnel in his left knee. He was my first casualty. And he survived in spite of me.

What did you do for him?

I just put a bandage on him and got him out of there and back to battalion med. He was back in about 10 days and got his purple heart.

After a few skirmishes I had become pretty well known and earned some respect. When the guys come and ask you, "Hey, doc, I don't have a corpsman to go with me. Do you mind going?" Or if they don't have confidence in the new corpsman yet . . . well you can't say no.

So, they'd personally request you as their corpsman?

Yes.

That must have been quite a compliment.

Yes it was. Very much so. I lasted 4 months on the front lines.

Weren't the lines pretty much up at the 38th Parallel at that time?

We were in and out of striking distance of the 38th. We would hit a reserve area on the Imjin River. We pulled 1 week of guard duty on two of the bridges across the Imjin and that was like R & R--rest and recuperation. They used to call it I & I--intercourse and intoxication-- that sort of stuff. I never got to pull any legitimate R & R. I wasn't there that long. But you'd get to the point where you'd start pushing your luck. I didn't sleep at night after the second month. When I had a patrol out from our position, I did not sleep. That's when all the crap happened--at night. So naturally I didn't sleep at night.

They'd send these patrols out to either reconnoiter the enemy lines or to try to capture prisoners to interrogate. Is that correct?

Definitely. We had our own recon platoon. A corpsman was the biggest man on the recon. They wouldn't let me go on recon because I was married. But my buddy, Mike Roberts, was on recon. He was the biggest guy in the platoon. He used to play tackle for Ohio State.

I got hit at 11:30 at night on the 31st of August 1952, even though my records show I was wounded on the 1st of September.

How did it happen? Were you out on patrol?

As I said, I had been pushing my luck.

What do you mean pushing your luck?

Patrol-wise. We had a couple of my people killed up there. This is a touchy point.

Anyway, I won't go into the whole story. There was a snafu. The idiot split up the patrol. Of course, when I say idiot, that has to be a 2nd lieutenant. He split the patrol. Stuff happens in combat like friendly fire and stuff like that. He got one of my men killed by friendly fire. And then they left him. They were 2 miles in the valley at Panmunjom. We could see the

peace talks and the delegates. We were a half mile off Freedom Road out on a question mark-shaped point or hill surrounded by the enemy. They could shoot at us but there were certain areas we couldn't shoot back because of the nature of the peace talks and no-fire zones.

We had one reinforced company of Marines and were 7 ½ miles out in front of our main line of resistance (MLR). If the peace talks fell through, our job was to go into Panmunjom, rescue the negotiators, and get them back to our main line. That would be 12 ½ one way and 10 miles back.

Were you north of Panmunjom or at the same latitude?

We were almost right in the village of Panmunjom, their main line. We were at a place called Outpost Number 2. It was like the Santa Anna Freeway, traffic going in two different directions--trucks, tanks, everything. They moved mostly at night but you could hear them and identify them by the sound.

One of our guys was killed and I had to go out front of the lines several hundred yards to pick him up.

Were you facing North Koreans or Chinese?

There was a combination and you never knew for sure which. You could see them at a distance. The taller ones were generally Chinese and the Koreans, for the most part, were a little shorter. The Mongols were even taller. We ran into some Mongolian cavalry. We called them "monkeys on horseback."

Like I said, the night I got wounded, I was working--patching up a few people. We were under attack and I had some casualties. I was checking the lines and my platoon sergeant, a gunny sergeant, had been wounded. I was in our command post. It was the only place where we could have a light. It was well camouflaged. We had four casualties in there and a new corpsman--a third class. We were still getting a lot of flak from outside. So you had to check your line. I took the gunny's boots and clothes away from him. I had a couple of other sergeants wounded--nothing major--but I was going to evacuate them all anyway.

Cornelius Harney and Melvin Weiss, the guy I had carried back a few weeks prior, before I got wounded. They are both on the internet by the way, on the Korean War Memorial under Marines. My buddy George McDougal wrote a couple of articles about them that he had posted on there. George Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines. If you log onto that website, you'll find Cornelius Harney and Cpl. Melvin T. Weiss. My name is mentioned with Harney. It isn't mentioned with Mel because that was another touchy one.

Anyway, I checked the lines and was heading back to the CP bunker. I didn't have any more casualties at that time. Lo and behold, I get close to my own bunker and here's Harney and his stuff. He had gotten his boots and his pants back and he was . . . I didn't have the heart to hit him--put him out--but I told him to come into my bunker so I could reinforce his bandages before he dropped. I was going to slap him with a syrette of morphine but he had wounds that made me not want to do that.

What kind of wounds did he have?

He had abdominal and other wounds. You don't routinely give morphine with some kinds of wounds. Your job up there is strictly first aid to keep them alive. You might get into a little minor surgery to remove a little piece of shrapnel or something like that, but you don't get

into deep surgery unless you're forced to. With the advent of helicopters, we could get them back to surgery pretty quick.

Anyway, I was getting ready to slap him with a syrette of morphine and the crap started up again. They were less than a hundred yards away. You could hear the mortars leave the tube. They'd go almost straight up and then come down.

So, out goes Harney and all I can do is follow him, checking the troops--gung ho as hell. And then it quieted down and I said, "Okay, let's get back to our CP." So he headed back with me following him. Then I heard three of those damn things leave the tube. So I pulled him down in the trench, me on top of him, and held him down. One went to the left, one went to the right, and the other one right in my face. I was never knocked unconscious but they had to get a pick and shovel to get Harney up.

So, he was gone, then?

Yes.

And you were pretty messed up yourself.

Yup. So another corpsman, Willy Workman, who was with another platoon, was real close, right adjoining to me. He worked on me and got me to a bunker. The bunker had cardboard for one side of it.

Cardboard! That's really protective!

Oh, yes. One doctor from Company Med . . . We had our own company med too. That was sort of a base camp for Easy Med. Easy Med was Battalion Med. Anyway, Willy Workman got me pretty well patched up but I was going into shock so damn fast. Was I thirsty!

You had obviously lost a lot of blood by this time.

Yes, but Willy had some fluids going into me.

Plasma?

No. We weren't using plasma. We're were using serum albumin. I was wounded in all four limbs and face. To keep me from dying from shock, they slapped me with some morphine. It was almost like magic. The thirst went away. I was sucking on a bandage. They wet it and I sucked on it. You can't feed water to someone who is badly wounded. That's one thing we had against the English. Everybody got tea. I don't care what kind of wound they had. They had to have their damn tea. The stuff would be leaking out in their damn guts and everything else.

Was it a wet battle dressing you were sucking on?

Yeah, delicious stuff. Then they hauled me off. It was night so they couldn't get a 'copter in. They carried me off the hill back to Freedom Road, which was a good half mile away. They got me onto a jeep and we went 7 ½ miles over that gravel road back to our company med where they reinforced my bandages and started me on whole blood.

They were then able to get a 'copter in. They put me in a basket on the outside and flew me back to Easy Med. There they took some x-rays, reinforced the bandages, gave me some more blood.

Did they have tourniquets on you at that time.

Oh, yeah.

Did you know then how badly hurt you were?

The only thing I was concerned about were the family jewels. I knew I was hit there because the flak jacket I was wearing didn't have that little flap.

So you were wearing a flak jacket at the time.

Yes. That's the only reason I'm alive. It was a real lifesaver. It would stop a .45 point blank. It would turn a burp gun but it would not turn a high caliber rifle like a 30-06.

But it would protect you from shrapnel.

Yes, shrapnel and other small arms fire.

So, I was at Easy Med. I knew everyone. I had worked with them. They decided that I was in too bad a shape and no surgery there. They again put me on a helicopter. Nobody wanted me by that time. They put me inside the 'copter, underneath the pilot. I remember him. He was Marine captain. He kept looking at me--concerned. He seemed like a nice guy so I decided to put him at ease. So I smiled at him and must have moved because blood spurted out of my shoulder. And I thought the guy was going to crack the 'copter up. I decided that I had better not look at him anymore.

We landed on the flight deck of the USS *Repose* and I was admitted into surgery at 9:10.

What date was this?

It was the 1st of September.

So this was the day after you were wounded.

I was hit at 11:30 the night of the 31st and 9:10 the next morning I was having surgery. I was still conscious the whole time until I went into surgery.

Here's when I ran into a guy I had gone through neuropsychiatric school with-- Peterson. He was working the OR. He was giving me the hound dog look. The guy who had gotten me off the 'copter was Harold Taylor. He was a second class at the time. So here's Peterson giving me the sad look. The last thing I remember was telling him "Don't look at me like that, you bastard. I'm not dead yet."

Actually, I was in a coma for quite a while, how long I don't know.

You mean after the surgery?

Once we went in there, I don't remember anything for quite a while. I don't know how long I was in a coma. I lost track of time. I do know that they had me up on the SOQ (sick officers' quarters) in a private room.

You must have been quite a celebrity to be on the SOQ.

I guess so. I was having a helluva nightmare when I finally snapped out of it and came to. There was a little Navy nurse named Kimmie. She was Japanese and that's what we called her. She was a lieutenant, j.g. I had evidently messed my rack. I was on the critical list at the time. The first thing I could see was my stump--the leg. And, at that time I thought I still had my left arm. My right hand was still a mess. And I still had my left leg. I could still feel my left

arm so I didn't know that it was missing. I had a big bandage on my shoulder. She said, "Danny, what's wrong?"

I said, "My goddamn leg's gone. Can't you see it, you stupid bitch?" This is pretty heavy, huh?

Yes, it is. But that must have been a helluva shock to wake up and find that you were missing a leg.

I think if it had been anyone else, I might have been a different person.

What was her reaction to your comment? What did she do?

Immediate tears. And that ended any bitterness. A couple of days after that I was moved out on a regular ward.

When did you notice your arm?

I'm not sure. Some time between the time I woke up on the SOQ and when they moved me to the ward, I must have noticed. I just don't remember. Even today, I can still feel both limbs even though they are gone.

Have you ever been in touch with that nurse, Kim, since then?

No. But I'll tell you what I did. A few days after that . . . I had built up a friendship with a lot of Marines. There was this Irish kid named Charles Callahan. We called him Chuck. Chuck and I got real close. By this time, I had become quite withdrawn. I was on the regular orthopedic ward in a regular bunk. And here comes Chuck walking in still wearing fatigues. I spotted him and yelled out, "Chuck, you miserable bastard."

Well, they kept Chuck with me from that point on. He'd throw mashed potatoes in my face and that sort of thing.

But it was good to have your close buddy right there?

Oh, yeah. It was good therapy.

Was Kim still taking care of you then?

No. She was up on the SOQ. The first thing I did once I realized they would keep Chuck with me was to go get a wheelchair. I made him get me up and put me in the wheelchair and made him take me up to SOQ. And I apologized to Kim.

How did she react to that?

Tears.

And how did you feel about apologizing to her?

I felt a lot better. It was something I had to do.

Did you ever see her after that?

Once in a while, shed drop in and give me a big hug and kiss. The medical skipper on the ship would come down and make my rack. He was a nice fellow. He would give me shot of his private booze. He was very kind.

It sounds as though everyone there was trying to make you feel better as best they could.

Oh, yes. By that time I had gotten back to being a corpsman again. That meant I wasn't shocked about myself and my own body. I knew I was screwed up. I didn't know how bad. They had done a guillotine amputation on the leg. They would take me in on a daily basis and put the elastic adhesive gauze and then soak that with tincture of benzoin. Then they would change the bandage daily. I had developed gangrene in the arm. Sometime, while I was in the coma, I remembered coming out of it and seeing my left arm in a cast and in traction with pins through the fingers. The fingers were as black as charcoal. Gangrene had set in and I guess they had almost waited too long. I remember begging them to cut the damn thing off.

So when you woke up from the coma, you noticed that your leg was missing but at that point, you still had your arm.

No. Sometime during the coma I must have become lucid enough to realize the arm was still there.

So, when you came to briefly, the arm was still there but when you came out of the coma for good, it was gone.

Right. It was gone. Anyway, they would take all this garbage off and it was quite painful. When they were changing the dressings. Benzoin adheres to you. It is like glue. Nothing can survive in that mess. They used to call it tough skin. It's kind of like putting Cosmoline on human beings but it's a lot stickier.

And this was supposed to protect the wound?

It was supposed to keep the wound from dehydrating. There was another doctor there in the treatment. They had a sheet up while they were changing the dressing. And dammit, this hurt!

Was this the dressing on the arm or the leg?

The leg. They had this canopy over it. And I would say, "Let me see my leg." And they would say, "No. No. No. You can't do that."

So this doctor asked me if I minded if he took some pictures. And I told him, "I sure as hell do."

He said, "Do you mind if I ask why?"

And I said, "If I can't look at my own body, why should I allow you to take pictures of it?"

He then said, "Would you let me take pictures if you could see?"

I said, "Sure. Fair is fair."

So, finally they took the canopy down and I could see that they had done a guillotine-- just a straight chop off.

That was above the knee, wasn't it?

Above the knee about mid-thigh. I said, "Okay, thank you." This was fine and we got along a lot better after that.

He was your surgeon?

One of the medical officers on the ship. I had no idea who those guys were. And frankly, I didn't really care. My thoughts were elsewhere. There were a lot of my guys being treated on the ship and when I could go around in a wheelchair, I'd go around and needle them. I got tired of bedpans. They are horrible. I'd apologize every time I'd set a bedpan underneath a patient years prior. And now I was using one myself. There not so much fun.

I had this corpsman, a little guy. You see, I weighed about 185, 190 pounds when I was hit. And I told this little corpsman that I wanted to go to the head. Now he got me out of bed and set me in this wheelchair. When I got across the threshold in the head I was scooting past the mirrors over to the commode. I was out of the wheelchair scooting on one leg. My whole groin was full of wire sutures. I was a mess. But anyway, I went by a mirror and I had to stop and do a double take. I didn't know who I was. I only weighed about 93 pounds.

How long after your injuries did you see yourself like this?

It wasn't too long, maybe 3 or 4 days after coming out of the coma.

You lost a helluva lot of weight in those 3 or 4 days. But then you don't know how long you were in that coma.

I have no idea. The only thing I can tell you is that ship docked on October the 13th at Alameda Naval Air Station.

I'm confused. You were originally on the *Repose* but the photo we have of you, you're on the *Haven*. How did you get transferred from one to the other?

From the *Repose*, I made my second landing at Inchon. They lowered us over the side in a basket into a landing craft. We went through the lock system. They get 28-foot tides there at Inchon Harbor. We went through the locks into the inner harbor, got aboard ambulances, and they took us to the railhead, and then went by ambulance rail to Kimpo Airfield. There they put us aboard these big Globemasters [C-124] and flew us back to Japan where I had my first taste of cold milk and a sandwich. Then they put us aboard Navy ambulances and transported us to Yokosuka Naval Hospital.

There I met a guy I went through corps school with in San Diego. His name was Johnson. They put us on a ward; we were scheduled to fly out the following morning.

They woke us up the next morning very early; it was still dark outside. A Navy captain came by to check up on one of his patients. This was a guy I worked with when I got my first duty station on orthopedics at Oceanside--Santa Margarita Ranch. His name was Dr. Cantrell. He was a commander then. I said, "Dr. Cantrell." He didn't recognize me until he looked at my chart. Then he said, "What the hell happened to you?"

I told him what happened and he said, "What are they going to do with you?"

I told him that we were supposed to fly out of there this morning. He said, "You don't want to go home looking like this, do you?"

I said, "I don't even know if I wanna go home."

He said, "Don't let them take you. The *Haven* will be leaving here in about a week. They've got a bunch of good surgeons on that boat and we can get you in pretty shape before you get home." Like I said, I had the best treatment all the way.

They even laid in a supply of Budweiser beer. They had good meals for me. They were trying to put some weight on me. I was being cared for by corpsmen and nurses. A Red Cross lady came by and wrote a letter to my wife.

So then we went aboard the USS *Haven* and went up to northern Japan and picked up some Army patients and then headed back stateside. My buddy Chuck was with me. When we got to Pearl Harbor I figured I would go ashore. A supply sergeant came around and said, "I don't have a billet for a corpsman; do you mind being a master sergeant in the Marine Corps?"

At that point I was promoted to master sergeant in the Marine Corps and I got a new sea bag--Marine green. I got paid the whole time by the Marines.

My two favorite surgeons were Dr. Hyatt and Dr. O'Dell. I called them Digger and O'Dell. During this time they kept taking me down to Ear, Nose, and Throat and taking the scabs off my eardrums. Both were perforated. I finally got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore so I told them to go to hell. I wouldn't go down anymore. But I went to surgery two or three times before we got to Pearl Harbor.

What kind of surgery?

A little clean-up stuff. They did a revision on my leg. They took off a little more bone to effectively close the wound. Remember, I had a guillotine amputation.

So they removed a little more bone so they could make a flap.

Yes. When we got to Pearl. . . Would you believe, I've never set foot in Hawaii? But Callahan had me dressed in a nice clean uniform as though we were going ashore. Then Digger and O'Dell came by and asked me where I was going. I told them I was going ashore.

"Well, I don't think so."

"Well, you lousy bastards told me that I could go ashore."

"I don't think so. You're still on the critical list."

I got very violent and called them everything under the sun. So they got a needle and knocked me out for awhile.

So you never got ashore.

I never got ashore. So they came to me. The Marine wives came aboard and were doing the hula with the sarongs and everything, all around my bunk. I was hearing the Hawaiian music and all but I couldn't wake up. They really had given me a knockout dose.

Evidently, they were kissing me on the cheek and everything. When I finally managed to snap out of it, the first thing I saw was Hilo Hattie. She was a delightful Hawaiian but just as broad as she was tall. But could she dance! And she had a nice voice. Well, I woke up in this narcotic stupor and . . .

We pulled out of Pearl a few days later and got back to the states on October the 13th. We came under the Golden Gate. And for the first time, I was able to brush my own teeth. I put a toothbrush in the ace bandage on my hand and brushed my teeth.

That photo we talked about, the one where you're sitting on the edge of your bunk with the cigarette in your hand and looking into the camera . . . What were the circumstances of that photo?

I was on the *Haven* in my bunk. There's an interesting story. The minute we came under the Golden Gate Bridge, I was automatically back in the Navy. Up to that point, the Marines had been paying me, I had been dressed as a Marine and the whole shmear. They sent photographers aboard to take photos and that's when this picture came about. There were some others that were taken that day and wound up in the paper.

I was scheduled to be the first one off the ship. They put two tags on me. Someone came around and slapped a white tag on me and I tore it off, or rather, I had my buddy tear it off and put a green tag on me. A green tag was Marine. And I'd just be damned if I was ready to go back under Navy command. So I wound up not being the first one off. I got off fourth or fifth, I guess.

So the photo was taken right about the time you were under the Golden Gate.

No. It was taken in the harbor at Alameda. It was a typical snafu.

Well you've got this casualty tag around your neck and it says US Navy Medical Department on it. It looks like a white tag.

That's right. And that's the one I had my buddy tear off.

So you had this one on for the picture before you put the green one on.

That's right. I don't think I wore my Navy uniform after that. I think I wore strictly Marine greens even though I was back under Navy command. It was an interesting time.

So, I was taken from the ship and put aboard a bus ambulance. There was a picture in the paper and in the newsreels of my wife.

We have that article here. You're on the bus and your wife and two other people are outside the bus. They're looking in at you and you're waving.

Then they took us up to Oak Knoll and put us in an overflow ward. In those days, that was the old hospital. But I was back home again.

It was lunchtime by the time we got on the ward and the first thing they served was chow main. And I said, "I'll be damned if that will happen," so Callahan and a couple of other guys got a wheelchair and we went down to the ship's store--the geedunk stand--and we had ham and eggs.

Did they put you on the orthopedic ward?

The amputee ward, yes.

Do you remember any of the nurses who worked there?

A few. But all the nurses I had worked with before were on the neuropsychiatric ward. There was one nurse, in particular, on the amputee ward. She was the dietician. Her name was Helen Vukovich. Helen was a beautiful lady and a delight. I even heard from her after I got out of the Navy.

There was another nurse who had been in charge of the corps school. We called her "Mother Mary." Her name was Mary Worth, an Irish Catholic from Boston. She was as red-headed as she could be. She got one look at me right after I got on the amputee ward and gave the other nurses that ice cold stare of hers and said, "I will be back."

Then she went down to the ship's store and bought a razor and brush. Then she went to the psychiatric ward and brought back towels and wash cloths. Then she took me into the utility room and scrubbed my head. I still had blood and crud in my hair. She shaved me. I felt sorry for the poor nurse who was on the ward because she said, "Can I help you in any way?" And the nurse said, "No. You've not done anything worthwhile yet. We take care of our own." She would say, "It's better to light one candle than curse the darkness." That was her saying.

There was another nurse, Cats Murphy. My first night back I woke up about 4 o'clock in the morning and someone was near my bed. And here's Cats Murphy crying.

She was crying?

Yes.

What as going on?

She was crying about me. You get pretty close to these people, you know.

What was her first name?

I don't know. We just called her Cats. She fed all the cats. She would take food from the chow carts and feed the cats.

I'm looking in my Navy Nurse Corps Association directory and I see a Catherine Murphy from Clinton, Massachusetts. Could that be her?

Could be. And there was another redhead named Charlotte Bailey. She was a tough old broad, but an absolute delight.

What kind of rehabilitation were you getting on the ward?

I went for minor surgery a few times, taking a piece of shrapnel out of here and there. Finally they got all the sutures out of my body and did a pectoral synoplasty on me. That was done by Dr. Thomas J. Canty.

Did you know a nurse on the ward named Sarah Griffin?

Yes. Yes. A leg amputee. Yes. Sarah lost her leg in Cuba, falling off a cliff.

I just talked with her a few weeks ago.

No kidding! She's still alive?

Oh, yes. Very much so.

Wonderful!

So, Dr. Canty did your surgery?

He did the synoplasty. He's an old fraud.

What do you mean?

After they did the synoplasty. Do you know what a synoplasty is?

No. Tell me.

It's a tunnel they put in through the pectoralis major. They put a hole in the muscle. They take the existing skin that's over the muscle and make a tunnel. They put a piece of cloth in there--a wick--through there. Then they take a graft and cover the exposed muscle. They just lift the muscle up, put a hole underneath it, and use the existing skin to line the hole, and put a graft on top of it. In my case, the graft didn't take all at once.

The same day, Dr. Canty chewed out a corpsman for not using sterile procedure with a suture pack. I felt sorry for the corpsman. An hour later I was down in the limb shop, and Dr. Canty has this rusty, old pin. It was like a bolt that he put a curve into. In those days, they lined

the bolt with acrylic--this rusty, old pin. There was a big can of vasoline with sawdust and spiderwebs all over it. So, here I am standing there. He wanted to measure this pin for me. So he takes this rusty pin, slops it in the can of vasoline, puts it through the hole in the tunnel.

This is in your stump?

No. In my shoulder. I don't have a stump. I'm a shoulder disarticulation. And he puts this pin in there. And I says, "You miserable fraud!"

This was Canty?

Yes, CDR Canty. I said, "You miserable, goddamn fraud. An hour ago you chewed out that poor corpsman for not using sterile procedure and you pull stuff like this." He laughed. Anyway, that set the tone.

Dr. Canty also did a chief gunner's mate who had lost his right arm. I think I'm one of the very few shoulder disarticulations who wears a prosthesis that has been considered successful. And I'm still going strong with it. As a matter of fact, that first arm was kind of primitive. Once I got in the civilian world with the VA, I was able to have a little more say in the type of prosthesis. I'm not criticizing my naval counterparts at all. The people they had were topnotch.

And even though Canty was, as you say, a fraud, he still knew what he was doing.

Oh, yes. When I say he was a fraud, that's out of affection. I had nothing but respect for Dr. Tom.

When left you last Thursday, you had just gotten to Oak Knoll. Tell us what happened there.

When I got to the hospital they put us on an overflow ward then we were moved the next day down to the amputee ward. There we got acquainted with a lot of other fellas.

What did the orthopedic ward look like? Was it separated into the amputee part and the regular ortho part or were you all mixed together?

The ortho part was down in another ward. We had two wards that were devoted to amputees. There were a lot of amputees at that time. There was A Ward and B Ward. Orthopedics was down at 41 A and B and then 40 A and B.

What were they doing for your injuries?

By that time, most of my surgery had been done on the way back to the states. The only thing they did at Oak Knoll was to remove a little shrapnel that remained. Of course, I had the pectoral synoplasty done by Dr. Canty.

Were you fitted with your prosthesis at that point?

Yes. They fitted me with the old Navy Fitch arm. It was named after a civil service worker who had improved upon the existing arms and elbows that were available. He took a wooden ball and began carving it. It had a couple of pulleys and by anchoring them here and there, he made a moveable elbow. But it took a lot of travel with the cable to raise the forearm. It worked very well for an above-elbow amputee if there was some stump left. But with a complete shoulder disarticulation I had no such leverage. That's why Canty put in the pectoral

synoplasty. The pin went through the tunnel. I used it to open and close the prosthesis--the terminal device which in that case was a hook. At that time it was a Northrup-Sierra hook. It seems that Northrup himself was a bilateral arm amputee. He had a shop in Palo Alto and lived in Chester, CA. He commuted from Chester all the way down to Palo Alto daily. He even flew his own aircraft. He later sold out to Sierra.

At any rate, the first prosthesis they made for me worked very smoothly but I had a rough time with the tunnel. I had a lot trouble trying to open and close it. There was a lot of breakage.

I'm trying to visualize how this all worked. You had a pin coming out of where your shoulder was?

Right. And there was a cable attached to the end of the pin. By moving my muscle, which was a very natural thing to do, like giving a bear hug, I could control that and built up enough strength where I could open the terminal device--the hook. And then the spring would close it again.

The hook was where your hand would be.

Right.

So the prosthesis had an elbow, a forearm . . .

First it had a bulkhead.

And this was seated against where your shoulder had been.

It fit right over my shoulder where the clavicle and scapula come together. I still had my clavicle and scapula. There's what is called a bucket--a mould--that fits over that. It's held on with one strap. That strap is attached to a cable which goes down through the elbow to the humerus to the terminal device. In the old days with the first Fitch Arm, all that did was to raise and lower the arm by flexing my chest or putting my other shoulder into it. That caused it to travel which raised the elbow. Then by relaxing, gravity would take over and lower the elbow.

In my particular case, I was opening the terminal device with the tunnel. Then I had a mechanical hand. It worked on a different principle which I'll explain later. But I had a lot of problems with breakage down in the tunnel and it wasn't very practical. You really couldn't support a drink in it because of the leverage involved. It was just too heavy. By the time you got to the end of the prosthesis--the hook itself--just the weight of a beer, for instance, would force the arm down. It was very difficult to keep it in one position. Empty, of course, it was a smooth working arm. It required a lot of travel, or excursion, over the pulleys. My first civilian arm got away from the Fitch Arm and it had a locking elbow in it. And this is what the synoplasty was designed for. It was able to operate the lock in the elbow. And, the one strap went down to raise and let the arm lower. That one strap, with the elbow in the locked position, would open and close the hook. The rubber bands which I use now or the spring with the Northrup-Sierra, would close it for you. It was a much better device and you could hold a drink in it. I've fed myself a meal with this prosthesis.

So this was the civilian model. The military model had the drawbacks you mentioned.

Right. After that, Dr. Canty started using some lock elbows. But Dr. Canty was reluctant to try new devices. I'm not criticizing him, not in the least. He was just able to do so many

things. However, the civilians were able to have more influence over the people you went to. A lot of the technicians the Navy had trained also had part-time jobs in civilian shops. This was true in my case. It worked out very well that way. But that's when I was out with the VA.

So while you were there at Oak Knoll, the first prosthesis was fabricated there.

Correct. That plus my leg.

Was that the second prosthesis that was fitted?

About the same time. The two prostheses coincided with each other. The arm was the easiest. The only thing they had to do was hook up the pulleys and attach the bulkhead. The leg was something else. At the time, they made the leg from a block of elm. They finished it by covering it with rawhide and then painting it. The knee was like a hinge but it was called a variable cadance. At the time it was a good leg. The foot was wood with a soft pad on it. The ankle was a cable that Canty had designed with a bolt swaged onto the end of it so that you could snug it down where the tibia and fibia would be at the bottom of the ankle. He had a machine there to test it at the speed of walking and ran it 24 hours a day to see how long this bolt would last. It was quite a thing in its day.

Canty designed this?

I believe so. Canty did a lot of things. He was pretty much an engineer, too. If you were in orthopedics, you had to be a lumber jack, a carpenter, and all this sort of thing.

What was the bulkhead you mentioned for your arm? What was that made of?

It was made of leather at that time. Plastics weren't in the picture then. Some of them were made of aluminum and/or sheet metal and covered with leather. They did not have the total contact bucket at that time. It took time to develop these things because they were all done with hand tools. It was quite involved. They were nasty. They were hard to clean. The buckets would crack; you had to be careful you didn't drop it over a hard surface. I've always worn a suction socket.

This is for the leg?

Yes.

Did they make an impression of your stump to fit the bucket?

They took measurements of the stump.

It was fully healed by this time?

Sort of. I think I mentioned before that I had piano wire sutures all through my groin. When I went for my first fitting, which was a rough block of wood with a hole in it. I was trying to pull into this block of wood. I put a stump sock over the stump and put it down through the bucket, as we called it. I was pulling into it when I got this horrible pain. One of the wire sutures had ingrown under the scar tissue and I had to go back up to the ward and have that thing removed. Then I went back and was fitted for the leg.

I should mention that my right hand was a mess, too. I had gotten some use out of it by this time. Where my middle finger is, the top portion of the distal end of the finger was blown off. So they sewed it up right to about where the quick begins on the fingernail. I had two little

pieces of fingernail left on either side. When they grow out they get snagged on things. It looks like a face with eyes. I've had a lot of fun with it.

You must be the life of the party with that.

When they sewed that up there they used black nylon sutures and they sewed the distal end of that--the flap--through the quick. When they finally got around to removing that--a month after I got back to the states--that really set my ears on fire because they had to pull those two nylon sutures through the quick. It was a lot of fun, believe me.

In that famous photograph of you on the *Haven*, you can see that the right hand is bandaged. Somehow you managed to hold a cigarette with that hand.

Like I told you earlier, coming under the Golden Gate that morning, it was the first time I was able to brush my own teeth. And I had to stick the toothbrush inside the bandage.

How long after you checked into Oak Knoll did they begin fitting these prostheses?

Very quickly. As a matter of fact, we docked on October 13th. My wife had her first child on December 23rd. We had a local Oakland newspaper reporter, Bill Fisset. He was doing a lot of quasi truthful articles about different individuals at Christmas time. He did one about me. Of course, he called me Private N. This was to get people to donate to veterans' causes. I got quite a kick out of the article when it appeared. It was a typical tear-jerker.

What actually happened was that I had talked Dr. Canty into letting me take my leg home for Christmas. The arm wasn't difficult to handle but the leg required a lot of physical rehabilitation--walking training, etc. He told me I could go home with the leg but not to try to walk on it, fearing I would get hurt. I went home and put the leg on anyway.

And you tried out the leg?

It worked fine.

I guess you had probably practiced with it at the hospital?

Not very much. I was enough of a neuropsychiatric technician to know that whatever you do, the end result is going to be up to you. I didn't have the time. I had a wife, a family. I didn't have the luxury of spending too much time in the hospital.

In last week's interview, you had mentioned your initial reaction when you woke from the coma and found you were missing your leg and how upset you were. At this point, while you were being fitted with your prostheses at Oak Knoll, what was your mental state? What was your outlook on life?

Let me back up here a little bit. When I was coming back on the ship with Dr. Hyatt and Dr. O'Dell, I gave you the impression that I was kind of rough on these guys. I have a lot of respect for them. They did a great job and I really do admire them. Okay, they were a bit more experienced in orthopedics than I was. In my condition, which was not very good at the time, they told me not to expect very much. I told them that all I wanted was a chance. And I got a chance. And when I get a chance I make the most of it. It's that simple.

But as far as being bitter, no, no. On the contrary. I lost all the bitterness. Don't get me wrong. There have been times. But I learned to laugh at myself and once you learn to do this,

you're okay. I knew enough about life to realize that if anything was going to come of it, I'd have to help myself a lot.

At any rate, I talked Canty into letting me take my leg home. The first thing that happened . . . My mother in law stood the leg in the corner and put some dandelions and other weeds in the bucket.

So she made a planter out of it.

Oh, yes. It was very nice. I rather got a kick out of it. I had a lot of support. The main thing was, my wife stayed with me. A lot of guys didn't have that good luck. A lot of women couldn't take it.

When did you get out of the Navy?

May 31st, 1953.

And how long were you at Oak Knoll?

From 13 October, to 31 May.

So, as soon as you were discharged from the hospital, you were also discharged from the Navy.

The Bureau of Personnel came out with a directive that you would be discharged if you had finished your physical evaluation and medical board and if you were awaiting retirement or discharge. In my case it was retirement. If you needed further treatment, you had to go to a VA hospital or report to Treasure Island. At this point, I ran into Dr. Canty in the passageway and I said, "Dr. Canty, what's this bullshit?" He said, "Dan, I have no control over it. It's a BUPERS order."

"Dr. Canty," I said. "I know better. When I leave this compound, I want to be completely through with everything."

I realized at that time that I was going to be retired and I didn't want to use up whatever leave time I had coming. I didn't want to report to Treasure Island, nor did I want to go into a VA hospital. When I left there I wanted to be finished with the Navy and everything.

Forty-eight hours later, I was called down to personnel and a chief hospital corpsman hauled me through, did all my papers, took me across the passageway to a VA representative and filled out all my VA papers. I waived retirement for VA compensation. They took my picture for an ID card. I went by the Red Cross and made sure I didn't owe them for doughnuts or anything, checked out with the library, and left Oak Knoll that same day.

When you say you waived retirement, this meant in lieu of getting retirement benefits from the Navy, the VA would take care of you for the rest of your life.

Right. The benefits would be two-fold. There would be more money and non-taxable. Whereas my retirement pay would be 70 percent of my pay for my rank. That would have come up to about \$75 bucks a month, not enough to do very much on. In retrospect, it was \$300 **(Was this per month?)** under VA. Then, of course, I went to school under the GI Bill. But it took 3 months before my pay started coming in. We had a few slender months.

Now that you were out of the Navy you were being treated by the VA for your physical therapy.

No. The VA took care of the repairs and the cost of my prostheses after that.

What about any additional physical therapy after that?

To tell you the truth, I did my own physical therapy.

How did you do that?

I started commuting from El Cerrito to Oak Knoll by bus. And I went in uniform. I'd walk three blocks down to the bus stop, get on . . . A few times I busted my ass. A couple of times I nearly ended up underneath the bus. But, like I said, I had a wife and child. I didn't want to live with my inlaws. I didn't feel like sponging. And I didn't have time. A friend of mine was just a single amputee below the knee and he was in there 18 months before he got out.

When you were doing this commuting by bus from El Cerrito to Oak Knoll, you hadn't been discharged from the Navy yet.

No. I was still on active duty and wearing Marine greens.

Then, once you got out in May, your physical therapy was over.

My physical therapy was over.

And the VA just picked up as far as taking care of your prostheses and any other health problems you might have.

Correct. Although I had the option, since I was retired, of having the Navy take care of my health needs as long as I could. I stayed with the Navy, although I had a private physician at home for my family. I did this until they closed Oak Knoll. Once they closed down all the bases in the Bay Area, that's when I went to the VA. I was actually a patient with the VA right along for a couple of things. I had a couple of operations there. Frankly, if I'm gonna die, I'd prefer dying with my own kind, which was at Oak Knoll. For the major stuff I went there. The VA left an awful lot to be desired, as far as I'm concerned. And it still does. They've changed a lot and made a lot of improvements. It's much better than what it was. At the rate I'm going, I know that one of these days I'll probably wind up in a VA facility and when that happens, well it will happen.

So, now you're on your own and have a family and you have to make some kind of living. What did you do?

This was a bit of a problem because all my life I've wanted medicine. And here I am retired. Prior to going into the Navy I was classified as a farmer. And once I left the Navy my specialty rating was physician's assistant or neuropsychiatric technician. If I had been physically able to restrain patients, I could have gone to work at any mental hospital. But as it was, nobody would hire me. And the arm at that time was still the Navy Fitch.

Anyway, I waited around and after 3 months, I, my wife, and son moved into military housing at Alameda at the Naval Air station. That took a third of my income living there.

But you were out of the Navy. You could still live in Navy housing?

Yes. I was a retiree. We ate a lot of beans in those days. We had quite a time. The Fourth of July at Alameda was interesting. With all the fireworks, I was still a little jumpy in

those days. I remember having to get out of town for a while. What was even worse were the jets coming in to land. They made whistling noises. To me, it sounded just like artillery.

Life took a little getting used to. My wife had to get used to living with a cripple, so to speak. Actually, I think the only time I was crippled was when I was completely helpless and couldn't use my hand. But other than that, I've never been crippled. Even in my dreams, I'm not an amputee. So, mentally, I've never accepted that I'm not a complete person. Even in my dreams, I manage to do things. And I do things. It might take me a while longer and I may cuss a lot, but I get it done.

Anyway, I started business college. Dr. Craighead, my battalion surgeon overseas, set me up with an interview with a Professor Young at Stanford University. He offered to give me any political backing that I needed to get into Stanford. It was very nice of him. But with the prostheses I had, at that time, I didn't think I would be able to handle it. And then with my own self rehab going on, I didn't think I could have handled med school. A couple of years later, I think I could have.

So, it was your intention at that point to still pursue medicine?

It was my first love.

You wanted to be a physician?

Oh, yes. But I just didn't have guts enough to keep the appointment at Stanford. Instead, I went for second best. I went for business school. It was on the quarter system. I realized that if I hung with it, I could do 4 years in 3. Which I did. It was quite a chore but I got a little extra money while I was in school. Thanks to Congress, there was another public law. By this time, we had another boy. The year I graduated from college, my oldest daughter was born. We had bought a home under the GI Bill out in Pleasant Hill. I was in a fraternity at school. After I got out of college, I was ready to set the world on fire. I had gotten good grades. I even passed the entrance exam for civil service. But I got deflated a couple of times with civil service. Finally, I said the hell with it.

It took me 9 months before I was able to get a job. I worked part-time at a service station pumping gas and doing lube work. For a double amputee, that's not too shabby. Eventually, I got an in-house job as a freight and traffic clerk for Pabco Fiberboard Paper products. They made asbestos shingles, roofing, asphalt, linoleum, paint. I stayed with them for about 2 years. They closed up their plant in Metuchen, New Jersey and brought back all the people from there, so being one of the low people on the totem pole, I was let go.

In the meantime, I interviewed for a job at Hunter's Point freight traffic. It was a civil service job. I was fitted for safety glasses, helmet, had my photo for an ID, then I got bumped by someone from another base. So I gave up on civil service. Ten point preference meant nothing.

I went fishing for a couple of weeks and a friend of mine told me there was a job as a weighmaster at the Blake Brothers quarry in Richmond. It had been in business since 1906 and helped rebuild San Francisco.

So, I went out, was interviewed, and became a weighmaster for the quarry. I spent 5 years out in that rock pit. In the meantime, Blake Brothers sold out to Standard Oil and I was the only salaried employee that the new company, which was Richmond Export, Bottoms and Johnson, kept. This was a highballing outfit.

I drank a lot too. Quite a bit with alcohol like a lot of amputees. The raises kept coming but they poured a lot of booze. I stayed 2 years with those guys and that was about it. I went with the Disabled American Veterans and took over their salvage operation.

Salvage operation? What was that all about?

They had developed a store and were soliciting donations. I ran the salvage operation for several years and then had a partner who I went into partnership with . . . One of the first things was a beauty parlor. We had five different operations going at one time. I was the general manager for the whole crew. Then we had a falling out. I stayed in the game up at Vallejo.

Then I opened up a bar and restaurant. I took that over in Benicia, a place called Sam's Harbor. I was going 7 days a week, several hours a day for a long time. I worked hard and played hard.

Then, on the way to work one afternoon, my two sons were helping me out. They were teenagers. This idiot rear-ended us. I was kind of battered around in that one. In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, I had no feeling in my body and couldn't move any of my limbs. The ambulance had another wreck on the way to the hospital. It used my head for a battering ram.

I ended up spending 2 weeks in the hospital back in Pinole after I left the emergency room in Vallejo. I wasn't able to do very much after that. The feeling had come back into my arm and leg and the pain started. When the pain began I knew I was okay.

I ended up having to close the bar. I signed the license over to another Army amputee. He ran it for quite a while and then some pilots bought it. It's a long story. But I got so deep in the hole, that I finally decided to pull my horns in. By this time, I had bought a cabin up in the mountains near Lake Tahoe. I realized that I was pushing my luck again. Two wrecks in one day! So I kind of quit and began doing a lot of volunteer work, and I've been doing volunteer work ever since.

Your wife was telling us that you volunteer over at the police department.

Yes. As a matter of fact, for a long time I did volunteer work at the VA. I trained amputees among other things. I got involved with AARP [American Association for Retired Persons]. They volunteered at the police department answering phones at the front desk. And I was also involved with veterans' organizations.

They asked if I wanted to volunteer at the police department. I said that I didn't want to answer the phone and I didn't want to work the front desk being a secretary. They finally had an opening maintaining their vehicles. So I decided to do that but never did; instead they did a very extraordinary thing. They gave me a key to "Outer Evidence" and "Inner Evidence." Evidence is the most secure and inaccessible place in any police department. But they did not give me a key to the front door of the police department. I had to check in with the front desk. That was 1988. My job was to purge guns. They had guns of every type imaginable. One whole bulkhead was loaded with guns--long guns, short guns, collectors items, you name it. Not to mention what was filling the property and evidence room.

So I worked with an ex-Marine. He didn't want to spend too much time with that. He'd rather play cop--ride around with the guys at night and play traffic cop. I realized that there was a little more to it. You can't just go in and start throwing these damn guns in a trash can. So I got a copy of the penal code and realized that each case was different. To make a long story short, I made a deal with the police department that if they would pick up the tuition and books, I would spend the time getting an education so that I would know what I was doing.

I had been to a few property classes prior to that. I then heard about an evidence class that was being given by the Contra Costa County Crime Lab. They got me into this class of professionals--detectives and other police officers. I was the only civilian and the only volunteer. It was a 2-week class and I got 110 hours in those 2 weeks. It was one of the best classes I ever had. I persevered and these guys tolerated me so I got through the class okay.

Things escalated from there. The director and assistant director of the crime lab taught a full-year course at Diablo Valley College. I enrolled in the class. John Murdock, the director, was teaching the course. He's one of the best instructors I've run across and I spent a full year with him. We became very close friends. He now does firearms and tool mark identification for ATF [Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] in Walnut Creek. He's one of the best in the business and we've stayed friends over the years. I ended up scoring the highest grade in his course by a student.

So, I ended up being the most highly trained individual they had in the Pinole Police Department as far as crime scene investigation.

Did they put you on the staff?

They wanted to put me on the payroll a long time ago. But I wouldn't let them. I told them I liked my freedom and I still do. I spent 7 years handling major crime scenes--homicide, everything. I'm pretty proud of what I've been able to do. I've gotten a lot of accolades. I've been able to teach a lot with new cops. About 7 years ago I got a partner. He's an ex-Navy guy and we get along very well and have become close friends. I finally got him certified as an evidence technician, which I am. I'm also part criminalist. We've managed some homicides together. We've even had some national attention. We still handle quite a bit.

Over the years, as prosthetic technology got better, you've probably been refitted several times.

Dealing with the VA over the years was really an experience. I now wear a hydraulic knee unit. With the advent of plastics . . . plastics were so much easier to take care of. But it wasn't all roses. With the old prostheses and even with the newer ones, I used to come home in the evenings, pour out a quart or two of sweat and blood--the end of my stump would be like hamburger. And, of course, I had to get up the next morning, put the leg back on, and go right back at it. In those days, there was not a lot of income from the VA. If I wanted to live at a poverty level, we could probably have done so. But I had children I wanted to educate and I wanted a little better life than just the average individual.

Sounds like you did a pretty good job.

Well, both my sons were in the military. My older son was a linguist with the Army. His eyesight wouldn't allow him to go in the Navy or Marine Corps. Arabic was his specialty. He spent a little while at the Monterey School of Language.

My youngest boy was a Navy corpsman and then spent some time with the Marine Corps. He picked up hepatitis on Okinawa which damn near killed him.

My oldest daughter works in a hospital in Ely, Nevada.

My baby daughter is in human resources. She took her degree in psychology. She became a worker's compensation specialist. She works in human resources in Solano County.

It sounds like you've had an extraordinary life.

It's been interesting. We had our 50th anniversary in March. Had a helluva good party. I'm also Commander of the VFW, Rodeo Post. I'm past Commander of the DAV, a couple of different chapters.

We really appreciate you sharing your experiences with us.

Thanks for the opportunity to do it. I haven't done this before. There are things I've told you guys that I just don't share with other people.

We feel honored that you shared it with us.

I feel honored that you called me. I'm going to try to make my first ever George Company, 3rd Battalion, First Marine reunion this September in Reno. I haven't been before and my buddy George McDougal is also going to try to be there.